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**From:** EgyptInfo  
**Sent:** Tuesday, May 18, 2010 10:25 AM  
**Subject:** Official Campaign Period Opened Yesterday for Egyptian Shura Council Election  
**Attachments:** oledata.mso; image001.png



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 May 18, 2010

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### Official Campaign Period Opened Yesterday for Egyptian Shura Council Election

- 490 candidates representing a variety of parties and independents to compete for 88 seats
- Independent High Elections Commission (HEC): No candidate above election law
- HEC certifies regulations for fair, equal and neutral media coverage, including free air time for all parties and candidates
- Candidate representatives, civil society organizations to observe election process, and domestic and foreign media granted access to cover voting
- To read the Ministry of Information's HEC-certified state media coverage regulations, please click [here](#).

Washington, D.C. – Yesterday in Cairo, the independent High Elections Commission (HEC) of Egypt announced the opening of the official campaign period for the 2010 Shura Council election that will take place on June 1<sup>st</sup> of this year.

The Shura Council is the upper house of the Egyptian parliament, which provides advice to the People's Assembly, the lower chamber, and whose consent is required on fundamental laws that implement provisions of the constitution. The Council is made up of 264 members who serve for six years. Mid-term elections take place for half of the elected seats (88) every three years.

The HEC announced that 575 candidates applied during the candidate registration period, with 490 being certified. A number of applicants were not registered for reasons such as failing to provide certificates of completion of compulsory military service or having previous criminal convictions.

#### **Level Field for Campaigning**

In his announcement of the opening of the campaign the Chairman of the independent HEC, Justice Intisar Nasim, President of the Cairo Court of Appeals said that "all candidates are equal in the eyes of the commission," adding that the Commission would strictly apply campaign rules, regardless of the candidates' political affiliation. The independent HEC's campaign regulations are drawn from constitutional and election law, including, among others, a ban on the use of public property or funds, houses of worship, violence,

threats or bribery, and religious slogans, or those promoting discrimination on the basis of gender or origin, as well as establishing a campaign spending limit of EGP 200,000 (USD 35,700) per candidate.

Justice Nasim also announced that the Commission would respond to any complaints from candidates or civil society observers, and that each candidate would be given a digital copy of the voter registry for the district in which they were competing.

#### **Fair, Equal & Neutral Media Coverage for All Competitors**

In parallel with the kick-off of the official campaign period, the Minister of Information, Anas El-Fiky, announced the certification by the independent High Elections Commission of a series of guidelines and standards for audio-visual media coverage of the Shura Council campaign. All state media will be required to abide by a number of basic guidelines, including among others: fair, neutral and equal access to coverage and state media for all parties and candidates; protection for the privacy of candidates; and strict separation of political advertising from normal coverage.

#### **Free Air Time for Parties and Candidates**

The guidelines also provide for free air time to political parties on national and local publicly owned radio and television networks to present themselves and their platforms to Egyptian voters. All candidates will be given free air time on local airwaves, as well as equal opportunity to purchase political advertisements.

#### **Independent Evaluation of Compliance**

The independent High Election Commission will ensure compliance with these principles through a multi-stakeholder committee established by the Minister of Information that includes representatives from all parties participating in the election; private and public media outlets and experts; and Egyptian civil society groups, including Egyptian human rights organizations. The Committee will report any violations or failures to abide by these principles to the Ministry and the independent HEC, which has the legal authority to rectify any failures.

Noting the radically changed media environment, which saw an increase in private television stations from 14 to 56 in the last five years, the Minister appealed to private media outlets to abide by the same principles of fairness, neutrality and equality in their coverage of the elections.

#### **Election Transparency & Election-Law Compliance to be Independently Observed**

The Commission also announced that every stage of the election, from voting to ballot counting, would be monitored by members of the judiciary, and be observed by candidates' representatives and Egyptian civil society observers, with additional access granted to domestic and foreign media.

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